

VZCZCXYZ0008
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHRB #1049/01 3091637
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 041637Z NOV 08
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9307
INFO RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY 4916
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 6056
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 5129

UNCLAS RABAT 001049

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/MAG AND INL
PASS TO DEA PARIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [SNAR](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: MOROCCO: 2008-2009 INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL
STRATEGY REPORT

REF: STATE 100989

¶1. Summary: The Government of Morocco (GOM) has achieved significant reductions in its cannabis and cannabis resin production in recent years. Advances in Morocco's counternarcotics efforts appear to be a function of the GOM's comprehensive counternarcotics strategy, which places emphasis on combining conventional law enforcement, crop eradication, international cooperation, and demand reduction efforts with economic development to erode the "cannabis growing culture" that exists in northern Morocco. The vast majority of cannabis produced in Morocco is consumed in Europe and has little, if any, impact on the U.S. market for illegal drugs. Morocco is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.

Status of Country

¶2. Morocco is the world's largest cannabis resin (hashish) producer and has consistently ranked among the world's largest producers of cannabis, but its importance as a main source country for cannabis resin is declining. The 2008 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports that fewer countries around the world are citing Morocco as the "source" country or "origin" of the cannabis resin found in their markets. The percentage of countries citing Morocco as the origin of hashish found in their markets has dropped from 31 percent in 2003 to 18 percent in 2006. This progress appears to testify to the GOM's counter drug efforts and Afghanistan's increased cannabis resin production.

¶3. Cannabis remains primarily an export for Moroccan growers, with the vast majority of the product typically processed into cannabis resin or oil and exported predominately to Europe. Only very small amounts of cannabis and narcotics being produced in or transiting through Morocco reach the United States.

¶4. The cannabis industry serves as a livelihood for large segments of Morocco's population situated in the northern tip of the country between the Rif Mountains and the Mediterranean Sea, where cultivation is centered. Approximately 760,000 Moroccans living in roughly 60 percent of villages in that area are involved in cannabis cultivation, according to the GOM.

¶5. The center of cannabis production in Morocco appears to have shifted from Chefchaouen to al-Hoceima due to GOM eradication efforts. Nearly 50 percent of cannabis cultivation occurs in al-Hoceima, with the surrounding provinces of Taounate, Tetouan and Chefchaouen, largely making up the rest of production. According to the GOM, the

province of Larache has become a less important area for cannabis cultivation.

¶6. Comparatively a smaller problem but growing rapidly, Morocco is also combating the growth in trafficking and consumption of &harder drugs, particularly cocaine. According to the GOM, South American drug smugglers are transporting increased amounts of the drug through Morocco and onward to Europe.

¶7. Heroin and psychotropic drugs (methamphetamine, Ecstasy, etc.) are also making inroads into the country but to a lesser extent than cocaine. To date, Morocco has no known enterprises that use dual-use precursor chemicals, and the country neither serves as a known source nor transit point for them.

----- Policy Initiatives -----

¶8. Morocco's national strategy to combat drugs rests on the four pillars of: (1) interdiction, (2) eradication, (3) international cooperation, and (4) demand reduction. Data suggests that Morocco's strongest actions have been in the areas of interdiction and eradication. GOM officials seek to build upon their already strong existing relationships with international organizations such as the UNODC, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), the International Narcotics Control Board (OICS), and INTERPOL. Demand reduction efforts; however, have been weak, as GOM officials still consider this to be mainly a European issue.

¶9. Morocco's national drug strategy is augmented by an emphasis on a broader economic development approach and crop substitution. Moroccan officials, however, readily admit that alternatives are often a &hard sell to farmers who can earn 18 times the earnings of a substitute crop such as barley by continuing to grow cannabis.

¶10. Moroccan authorities reported that they hope to complete another detailed drug study in cooperation with UNODC as well as revise their national drug strategy in 2009. Moroccan Ministry of Interior (MOI) authorities stated that they now have a goal to reduce cannabis cultivation to 12,000 ha by the year 2012. If this goal is accomplished, it will mean that Morocco will have reduced cannabis cultivation by 91 percent since it first started serious eradication efforts in ¶2003.

----- Law Enforcement Efforts -----

¶11. According to statistics from the Moroccan MOI, the following table is a summary of Morocco's drug seizure efforts since 2004. The decrease in cannabis and hashish seizures between 2007 and 2008 may partly be the result of successful GOM eradication efforts and droughts rendering less cannabis and hashish available on the local market. Note: 2008 figures include January through September only.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Cannabis	318MT	116MT	60MT	209MT	163MT
Hashish	86MT	96MT	89MT	118MT	79MT
Cocaine	4kg	8kg	57kg	248kg	25kg
Heroin	1,001g	5,335g	714g	1,906g	5,932g
Psychotropic Drugs(units)					
	168,257	94,900	55,881	55,243	35,673

¶12. The GOM reports it has deployed 11, 000 personnel into the Rif mountains and throughout the northern coastal areas to interdict drug shipments, maintain counternarcotics checkpoints, and staff observation posts along the coast. The Moroccan Navy carries out routine sea patrols. GOM forces are now using helicopters, planes, speed boats, mobile x-ray scanners, ultrasound equipment, and satellites in their

drug fight. The mobile x-ray scanner has proven to be particularly effective, allowing GOM officials to seize a record quantity of 11 metric tons (MT) of cannabis resin in Tangier in December 2006. The Moroccan Navy used a similar scanner to seize 3 MT of cannabis resin in April 2008 alone. The GOM recently acquired another mobile x-ray scanner for use in the port city of Nador.

¶13. In 2007, Morocco reports it arrested 18,734 Moroccans and 590 foreigners in connection with drug-related offenses. Of the foreigners arrested, 158 were Spanish, 70 French, 34 Romanian, 32 Dutch, 19 Belgian and 8 Italian. Arrests of traffickers at the ports, and at the Casablanca airport of arriving cocaine &mules8 from Sub-Saharan Africa, are frequently in the news. In 2007, 93 kg of the total 248 kg of cocaine seized by the GOM was seized at the Mohammed V International Airport in Casablanca; the majority of the 84 smugglers were West Africans in transit to Europe. Detection training and the use of ultrasound equipment were critical to the success of these seizures. As authorities become more vigilant, GOM officials opine that cocaine smugglers are likely to seek access to Europe through much harder to detect land routes and other methods.

¶14. Moroccan law provides a maximum allowable prison sentence for drug offenses of 30 years, as well as fines for illegal drug violations ranging from USD 20,000-80,000. Ten to fifteen years imprisonment remains the typical sentence for major drug traffickers convicted in Morocco.

¶15. Of special note, an American citizen was arrested on May 7, 2008 by Moroccan officials for an alleged drug shipment. On June 15, 2008, he was sentenced to seven years in prison, fined 1,200 USD, and had his aircraft confiscated. The court also sentenced two Moroccan accomplices to prison terms of six and four years respectively, and acquitted two others.

Corruption

¶16. As a matter of government policy, the GOM does not encourage or facilitate illicit production or distribution of narcotic or psychotropic drugs or other controlled substances, or the laundering of proceeds from illegal drug transactions. These actions are illegal and the government tries to enforce these laws to the best of its ability. Despite GOM actions to combat the illicit drug trafficking industry, narcotics-related corruption among governmental, judicial, military and law enforcement officials appears to continue.

¶17. In August 2006, authorities arrested senior government official Abdelaziz Izzou (the head of security at Morocco's royal palaces) for his cooperation with a major drug baron when he was head of the Tangier judicial police from 1996 to ¶2003. After a lengthy trial, Izzou received an 18 month prison sentence and had 700,000 MAD (approximately 100,000 USD) seized by the state in March 2008.

¶18. In December 2007, notorious drug baron Mohamed Taieb Ahmed (AKA &El Nene8) escaped from prison in Kenitra with the assistance of local prison guards. Authorities re-captured &El Nene8 in Spain in April 2008. For the role they played in the escape, Moroccan courts sentenced six Kenitra prison guards to prison terms ranging between two suspended months and four years on charges of forgery, corruption, and assisting a prisoner in escaping from custody. The GOM changed the management of its prison system and is also in the process of reinforcing prison security in response to this and other prison escapes in early 2008.

¶19. In January 2008, Moroccan authorities prosecuted three members of the gendarmerie (rural police) on corruption charges following a complaint made by an airline passenger traveling through the Agadir-Al Massira Airport. Moroccan police arrested the son of former Mauritanian president

Khouna Ould Haidalla in July 2008 for attempting to smuggle 18 kg of cocaine. In October 2008, he was convicted and sentenced to seven years in prison.

¶20. During a speech in August 2008, King Mohammed VI called on the government to work actively to ensure that the Central Authority for the Prevention of Corruption become a reality. While not very effective at the moment, such an agency may prove helpful in fighting corruption within the illicit drug trade industry in future years.

Agreements and Treaties

¶21. Morocco is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention, the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances and the 1961 UN Single Convention as amended by the 1972 Protocol. Morocco is also a party to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Morocco and the United States cooperate in law enforcement matters under a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT). Morocco is a party to the UN Convention against Corruption. Morocco has several cooperative agreements to fight against drugs with European countries such as Spain, France, Portugal, and Italy, and it seeks to work closely with other Arab and African countries.

Cultivation/Production/Eradication

¶22. Morocco succeeded in decreasing the land dedicated to cannabis cultivation by 46 percent from 134,000 hectares in 2003 to 72,500 hectares in 2005, due in part to an aggressive eradication campaign, carried out mainly by Gendarme and local authorities, according to GOM officials. Cannabis resin production dropped 61 percent from 3,070 MT to 1,070 MT during the same time period. Morocco used the following methods to eradicate illicit crops: (1) crop-dusting via airplane, (2) mechanical and manual destruction of crops and (3) burning.

¶23. GOM officials report that during the first phase of the 2008 eradication campaign, they were able to eradicate a total of 4,376 ha of cannabis in the northern provinces. This includes 2,695 ha in Taounate, 985 ha in Chefchaouen, 130 ha in Tetouan and 565 ha in Larache.

Drug Flow/Transit

¶24. Given its proximity to Morocco, Spain is a key transfer point for Europe-bound Moroccan cannabis resin where it can normally be transshipped to most other Western European destinations. France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy are also major European destinations for cannabis trafficked from Morocco.

¶25. The contraband is transported mainly via maritime and overland routes from northern Morocco, according to the GOM. Most large shipments of illicit cannabis bound for Spain travel via speedboats, which can make the roundtrip to Spain in one hour or less, although fishing boats, yachts, and other vessels are also used. Smugglers also continue to transport cannabis via truck and car through the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, known to have lower inspection standards than the rest of the European Union, and the Moroccan port of Tangier, crossing the Strait of Gibraltar by ferry. Spain's deployment of a network of fixed and modular radar, infrared, and video sensors around the Strait of Gibraltar, starting in 1999 and known as the Integrated System of External Vigilance (SIVE), has forced Moroccan smugglers to take longer and more vulnerable routes.

¶26. Latin American drug organizations have begun in recent years to exploit Morocco's well-established cannabis routes

to smuggle cocaine and perhaps also heroin into Europe. Although the main African redistribution centers for cocaine from Latin America remain sub-Saharan, including Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria, Morocco is increasingly being used as a transit country in a trend that can be expected to continue. In October 2008, the Colombian National Police seized a shipping container destined for Morocco with a declared cargo of aluminum roofing sheets but also containing 324 grams of cocaine.

¶27. Trans-national drug trafficking networks are a growing problem for Morocco. Although French and Spanish networks are more prevalent, Romanian drug networks appeared in Morocco for the first time in 2007 when 34 Romanian traffickers were arrested. There are initial indications of a Russian organized crime presence in Morocco, but not so far clearly engaged in narco-trafficking.

Domestic Programs/Demand Reduction

¶28. The GOM is concerned about signs of an increase in domestic cocaine and heroin use, but does not aggressively promote reduction in domestic demand for these drugs or for cannabis. Some press estimates suggest that as many as ten percent of adults regularly use cannabis, but the GOM does not currently have an effective system in place to measure and evaluate the situation. Morocco has established a program to train the staffs of psychiatric hospitals in the treatment of drug addiction. In partnership with UNODC, the Ministry of Health is exploring the relationship between drug use and HIV/AIDS infection in Morocco. Moroccan civil society and some schools are active in promoting counternarcotics use campaigns.

Bilateral Cooperation

¶29. The USG is working to enhance Morocco,s counternarcotics capability through training in law enforcement techniques, and to promote the GOM,s adherence to its obligations under relevant bilateral and international narcotics control agreements. U.S.-supported efforts to strengthen anti-money laundering laws and efforts against terrorist financing may also contribute to the GOM,s ability to monitor the flow of money from the cannabis trade.

¶30. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), which covers Morocco from its Paris office, continued its bilateral exchange of information with the Moroccans in support of several ongoing drug investigations in 2008. The DEA invited the Director of Morocco,s Investigative Police Agency to participate as an observer in the July 2008 International Drug Enforcement Conference (IDEC) in Istanbul, Turkey. Morocco has now requested full membership in the IDEC. The USG is presently working to provide the GOM a DEA internet-based communication tool that will enable Morocco to communicate directly with other countries in the region as well as South American counterparts. This new communication system will allow real time exchange of intelligence

information. In 2008, the U.S. DEA office in Paris was able to facilitate meetings and exchanges between the GOM and Colombian officials to discuss South American trafficking networks and the threat they pose to Africa.

¶31. USG training remains an important factor in Morocco,s efforts to combat illegal narcotics. During FY 2008, the U.S. Government provided training to Moroccan police, gendarmes, and customs officials in the areas of (1) narcotics identification and testing, (2) advanced U.S. Coast Guard boarding procedures, (3) fraudulent document detection and (4) customs and border issues. The GOM requested 2009 narcotics-related training assistance from the U.S. in the areas of airport interdiction, basic investigator techniques and money laundering. Other programs are anticipated in

support of the administration of justice that may favorably impact our continued involvement.

Road Ahead

¶32. The endemic nature of the cannabis culture in Morocco will only be ameliorated through incremental application of Morocco,s comprehensive counternarcotics strategy. The U.S. will continue to monitor the illegal drug situation in Morocco, cooperate with the GOM in its counternarcotics efforts, and, together with the EU, provide law enforcement training, intelligence and other support for the foreseeable future.

Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>

Riley